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Marginalia . . .

The ending of a year, as James once wrote of the ending of a novel, is for many persons like the ending of a good dinner, "a course of dessert and ices," "a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs, and cheerful remarks." We have little to do with babies or millions, but in these appended paragraphs, we have a few cheerful remarks about prizes in the year just ended.

The finest in contemporary American short fiction is honored annually in two outstanding collections: the O. Henry Prize Stories, *edited by William Abrahams, and* The Best Short Stories *collection edited by Martha Foley and David Burnett. The Foley-Burnett collection includes an honor roll of distinguished stories published during the preceding year. We glowed as we counted the six stories from* **four quarters** *that were honored. From the January, 1969 issue, the editors chose Lorrie Keister's "Friends" and Claude Koch's "You Taught Us Good." "Dear Harry," by J. F. Hopkins and "The Sunder Score" by Loy Otis Banks were chosen from the March issue. Robert Joe Stout's "Why Not Say You Loved Her?" and Thomas A. West's "The Sincerity of Coby Sedgewick" were the pair chosen from our May issue.*

We offer hearty congratulations to these contributors for their achievements. May they continue on to greater things in 1971.

Pleased as we were to have so many of our authors honored, we could not resist a thought for the many fine stories we've published over the years that haven't made any lists but have been their own rewards. In our maudlin mood, we also had some sympathy for the anthologists. And for their spouses. What would it be like to be married to someone who was reading a hundred literary magazines all at one time? Under such circumstances, how does one keep the coffee table straightened up?

Authors, anthologists, agents or agitators—we wish you a happy 1971 filled with acceptances, grants, awards, or whatever your taste in desserts and ices may be.

J. J. K.

The Plumber

• John L'Heureux

He always sat in the park. It wasn't really a park, it was more a fenced-in green, but he called it the park and he always sat there. It was cooler than his rooms and sometimes other people came to sit and, besides, where else could he go? So Mr. Ransom sat there every day watching everything that happened and within two days forgot everything he had watched. Thus his way of living provided him with endless stimulation. It was inevitable, therefore, that since he was eighty, people would think him mad.

The park was a tattered affair people passed through on their way somewhere else—to shop or to work or to shorten the distance between Cambridge Street and roadway. It was a gloomy place with patches of grass here and there, and a fountain that no longer worked, and a few benches. Few people except the old man ever sat there.

Saturdays were best in the park. That is, they were the nearest thing to summer which was really the best. You could always plan on plenty of excitement Saturdays, what with young girls—it was impossible now to guess how young, they all wore such grownup clothes—bringing back books to the library and lingering in the park to say hello to their boy friends. And the fathers who brought their children to play in the grass while they themselves did their homework; they were students at Harvard, no doubt. The women gossiping. That fine young man with the St. Bernard. The Jesuit from across the way who was growing a beard and who, when he spoke, always said such pleasant things even though all the unhappiness of the world was in his eyes. Regina, who never came except on Saturdays. The crazy lady with her bag of cookies. The lady with her pocket pekingese, the man with his two corgis, the professor with his astounding parrot. Saturdays were best in the park—except for summer.

In summer there were children every day and, even though he couldn't see Tim Keefe's house with the garden in front, there was splendor enough right in front of him. The baby squirrels played their antic games, foolishly freezing in position while a dog sniffed them all around, and then off terrified to a tree. And the birds, some fledglings and some mother birds, squawking and chirping and carrying on. And the dogs: the yellow mongrel with the crooked leg, the St. Bernard whose name was Abelard, the big black Labrador, the crazy brown and black dog that ran whimpering through the park, snapping at everyone who got in his path. Even the other dogs made way for him. What else? The swans singing in the trees when the sun shimmered through the sticky new leaves, but of course that was an illusion, he knew that. The glorious trees: maples, oaks, an elm in the corner near the library. The flowers, there were only three little clusters

of iris, but they were an unusual gold and purple, a heraldic device beside the cement fountain. The grass, each blade honed to a green perfection. And the weeds, no ordinary weeds, but dandelions and crab grass and, near the fence, a beautiful ragweed.

Catalogues never approximate the reality of things, failing usually by excess, but for Mr. Ransom they failed by default. No description was ever sufficient to capture the wonders of his park. Words only piled up categories, never captured the individuality of the thing, though of course he never said this nor did he think it. He had been a plumber all his life and his words and thoughts had always been ordinary, cliche-ridden; only his vision was strange.

* * * * *

Attix Ransom was not born in Cambridge. He had come there late one summer afternoon, a baby of two years, so that when he grew up he might attend Harvard. That was his aunt's idea which, along with most of her ideas, was never realized. All of his ancestors had gone to Harvard and Margaretta Susan Ransom, having determined that her ward would go there also, sold what little remained of the family inheritance and rented a tiny apartment in Cambridge where she became renowned for her fine sewing. She died when Attix was fifteen and had only just been apprenticed to a plumber. It was the plumbing, her friends said, that killed her.

Attix Cornelius Ransom was the greatgrandson of the richest man Louisiana had ever known. He owned not one but several adjoining cotton plantations, staffed by darkies he had never succeeded in counting, and he was an importer as well. Though he began life poor, the times and the land and the swelling slave trade made him a fortune which doubled each year. When in 1865 he died at a small town in Pennsylvania, "fighting to protect our slaves" he had said, his wealth miraculously remained intact in the hands of his son, Jason Cornelius Ransom. Miraculously, that is, insofar as the son's ability to bribe, cheat, and swindle Yankee and Nigger alike could be termed miraculous. Jason fathered and reared seven children amid fantastic wealth which did not prepare them for the financial annihilation which followed the long night of August 14, 1888, when their father gambled away every boll of cotton and stick of furniture they owned and then, being a gentleman, put a bullet through his head. His eldest son, Cornelius Attix Ransom, who had never worked and had never expected to work, found himself before the end of that same month the father of a child whose mother had died in labor. Cornelius named the child after its great-grandfather, Attix Cornelius Ransom, in the dim hope that he might re-establish the family fortune. Two years later, confused and rambling in his mind, he also died, and the baby fell to the care of Margaretta who took him to Cambrdige where he grew up and became a plumber.

He had heard the story of the decline and fall of the Ransoms often enough. At first it fired his imagination; he hoped to grow up to be a poet and the romantic grandfather who put a bullet through his head after he had wrecked the family fortune seemed to justify this vocation. Later he thought he might prefer to be an artist, words having proved recalcitrant

somewhere around the eighth grade, but that too was impractical since oils and canvas cost so much.

Hardworking and unimaginative, he became in time a plumber valued for his skill and efficiency. His work was his life, except on Sundays when he took long walks, on one of which he met Kathleen Riordan. She was charmed by the notion of a plumber with such a name as Attix Cornelius Ransom and her parents were pleased that their plain, broad-faced daughter had found a man who didn't drink and had a fine steady income, and she nearly thirty now with all hope of marriage gone. They were not pleased at his being a Protestant. Religion had never mattered to Attix anyway and so he entered the Catholic Church, attending Mass faithfully every Sunday for the forty years of their marriage, and after Kathleen's death and burial never attending again. He had done it for her and she needed it no longer, he felt, but he remained well disposed toward the Sisters and the clergy in general.

His marriage had been rich. The plain Kathleen loved him with a passion which had waited nearly thirty years for someone on whom to lavish it. She bore him a son, Cornelius, whom they called Neil, and when she was over forty a daughter named Kathleen. Neil went to Harvard where the clarity of his thought and precision of expression marked him early as the important lawyer he would later become. During his college years Neil never admitted his father was a plumber; that he should have such a background seemed to him somehow unfair. Kathleen, who began life with the Riordan face, blossomed unexpectedly into the Ransom beauty, and in her senior year at Radcliffe married her history professor and moved to California. He loved his children since they were the reflections of his singleminded love for his wife, but he loved them only vaguely. The center of his existence was his Kathleen, more plain and more broadfaced as she aged, and when she died his own life ended. He was seventy, two years younger than she; he sold the house and moved into the tiny apartment on Trowbridge Street where he waited to die. Meanwhile he went to sit in the little park he could see from his bedroom window. He had been going there for ten years, and now he was eighty, and not dead yet.

* * * * * *

Attix Ransom was a permanent figure in the park. People expected him to be there as they expected equestrian statues to be in Boston Common. He was in a very minor way an institution, seated on the bench with his hands folded, face smiling with pleasure at the things he saw.

He would arrive at ten in the morning with his little brown package and sit where the sun would strike him full in the face. The young women came by on their way to the laundromat, some pushing a huge sack of bedlinen in a baby carriage, some carrying it slung over their shoulders as if they were peasants bringing in the harvest. One had a golf cart. The Jesuit came by and stopped to talk for a moment; it was hard to guess what his work might be since twice a day he ambled through the park on what was clearly a walk. Who but retired old men take strolls twice a day, he wondered. The lady with the pekingese came by, shot him the look of

mistrust she had for ten years practiced on him, and when her dog had done its toilet, jerked at his leash and led him away. She was such a cross woman, he told himself, and said it not as judgment or condemnation but in wonder at the variety of human personalities.

At noon he would open his package and eat the grinder he bought each morning at the little food store over which he had his apartment. He ate only half of it, carefully wrapping the other half in the brown paper to eat with some soup for his dinner. He enjoyed the grinders, there were at least six different kinds, and they made cooking unnecessary.

After his lunch, he walked several times around the low wire fence that enclosed the park, allowing himself as much as an hour to gaze on the wonder of the Tim Keefe garden. It was a garish affair, three feet wide and nine feet long, into which were crowded four display tables. There was a cement birdbath on top of which a plaster pixie lifted her skirts from the water. There was a pile of three cement blocks supporting an enamel basin which overflowed with petunias; rising from the little sea of flowers was a rosy-cheeked Lady of Lourdes. There was a low stepladder painted silver, each step groaning with huge clay pots of petunias. There was a cafeteria table on which sat an enormous plaster frog; a sequinned net around him dripped almost to the ground; hanging from his neck were a string of glass pendants from an old chandelier. The little ground that remained was a mass of petunias and geraniums, flowers which in fall were replaced by chrysanthemums, some real and some plastic, and by jars of crimson broomgrass. The garden was something of a neighborhood joke, something everyone stopped to look at for any number of reasons. Mr. Ransom had only one reason; it was surpassingly beautiful.

Standing at the garden, he could shift his gaze to the left and admire the sign above the door. It was an enormous sign in red and white, proclaiming that this was the home of Tim Keefe, Hall of Fame Pitcher for the New York Giants. Above the sign, propped on a table, a carousel horse galloping into the air, a monkey astride his back holding a little banner which once again proclaimed Tim Keefe.

Shifting his gaze to the right he could marvel at the Costa Funeral Home; they were tearing it down now, a hazard to children ever since the fire there. But for the past ten years it had occupied as much of his attention as the garden.

A vast Venetian palace of stucco and green brass, it was faced on the first floor with innumerable marble pillars set into niches every few feet. The second floor was cream colored, with bits of turquoise glass forming geometric patterns directly above the pillars below. The top floor was a series of cupolas and arches below. The amazing feature of the house was the glass porch that stood above the entrance and extended almost to the sidewalk. Attix always expected to see candles burning there and women with long black veils kneeling. In fact, no funeral procession had ever gone in or out of the house nor were there ever lamps lit in the front parlors. There was something unpleasantly peculiar about the house, so out of place in its environment, so out of time. At night people walked more rapidly as they passed it and in the day boys would sometimes throw stones

at the back windows. But since the fire, they were tearing it down.

After his walk and his meditation, Attix Ransom returned to his bench where he would sit motionless for hours thinking of the wonders he had only now looked upon. The children never bothered him any more. They had at one time.

They would run by him shouting "Old Mister Pee-the-Bed, Old Mister Pee-the-Bed," giggling insanely all the while. After weeks of this and he never responding, one of the braver boys—he was ten—stopped in front of him and said, "Ha, ha, you're so poor you eat only half a sandwich." The others behind him picked up their cue and chanted, "Ha, ha, you're so poor" over and over until finally the old man's confusion cleared and he realized they hated him. To the boy who stood before him, hands on hips, legs spread, challenging, he extended the half-grinder. He smiled. The boy was suddenly frightened—feeling as he had that time after setting fire to a cat—and, uncertain of what his followers expected from him, he took the package, ran a little distance, and then in a fury threw it at the man. It struck him in the temple, peppers and bits of sausage splattering his clothes. He hung his head and said nothing. After that day none of the children ever bothered him again.

At seven or even eight he went home; in the fall he went earlier. He heated the soup and ate it and then, having poured himself a tumbler of bourbon, he would settle into the newspaper, reading everything and marvelling, forgetting what he had read as easily as he forgot what he had seen.

Thus his day was full with things seen and done; he had his park and his rooms above the food store and he had his visions.

* * * * * *

When Attix had first moved into the little apartment, Neil had driven up from Hartford, agitated and embarrassed at his father's excessive grief. He worried that the old man could not get along by himself and offered to hire a woman who would come in and cook at least the evening meal for him. But Attix would not hear of it, going so far as to lie to his son that in the past several years he had often done the cooking when Kathleen was feeling poorly and there was no reason on earth he couldn't continue to do so. Neil continued to worry, however, especially when with the passage of years something seemed to be happening to his father's mind. He wandered. He seemed almost whimsical at times. He would speak of things that had happened many years ago as if they had happened yesterday and, more alarming, speak of something recent—a riot on some college campus—as if it had occurred sixty years ago and he alone preserved the memory of it. Senility was harmless enough but in an old man living by himself it could be dangerous. Neil and his wife therefore visited him every second Sunday between two and five o'clock. Recently they had begun looking into the question of a nursing home, not knowing his devotion to his park or the regular occurence of wonders which made life beautiful to him.

It was a Sunday in fall when they decided the time had come to look after the poor soul properly. They made the decision after listening to his animated conversation, more vague and rambling than they had ever heard

it, noting for the first time that his thoughts had become quite incoherent.

Neil had again brought up the matter of his father's leaving the apartment for a nursing home where he would have proper care and where he could be with people of his own age.

"It must be terribly lonely for you here, Dad. For instance, what did you do yesterday?"

* * * * * *

Yesterday, like every day this fall, had been perfect. You can smell the fall, he said to himself, there's something in the leaves, the beautiful colored leaves. Even the grass seemed sweeter. There is nothing so beautiful as fall. Nothing.

"Well, hello!"

"Hello! Oh yes, hello!" He rubbed his hands and smiled at the young priest.

"Well, you've certainly got another beautiful day here."

"Oh yes. It's always beautiful in the park." He looked at the young man's eyes. A priest, he thought, and so sad, as if he had seen something too awful to tell about. "Your beard. It's turning into a fine beard."

For a while the Jesuit stood there saying nothing, though it was unlike him to stand still. "Our house is almost down," he said.

"Our house. Yes, it's too bad. It was a beautiful house in its time."

"It was still beautiful. *Still,* it was beautiful." He spoke as if he were angry. "People always have to destroy whatever is beautiful when they can't understand it." He turned and looked at the house and then turned back. "I'll tell you what, Mr. Ransom. When they finish wrecking it, when they've destroyed it completely, I'll join you here for lunch and I'll bring a bottle of wine and we can cheer each other up. Okay?" He spoke as if it were less an invitation than a challenge.

"Oh yes. Oh, that will cheer us up."

"Do you like wine? What kind do you like?'

"Wine?" Attix never drank wine. "Oh, I drink any kind. I like sweet wine."

"Sweet wine and grinders. Next week. You won't forget now. Everything depends on it." The young man stood staring at the old one; he seemed to have something difficult to say.

"Yes, yes," Attix muttered, "your beard is fine."

"God bless you, Mr. Ranson. And thank you." He walked away and for a moment Attix thought he was crying. A sad nervous young man.

Squirrels made the morning short, gathering acorns, skittering up and down the tree trunks. And then the man with the two corgis came by. They were old dogs and aristocratic and so did not condescend to sniff about after the squirrels or even to be distracted by them. They padded by, superior to everything around them, satisfied with their own doggy perfection, Attix thought. Look at them, the richest dogs in Louisiana, studying at Harvard, no doubt.

All morning there was a steady file of girls and boys going to the library. So many interesting faces, so many of them foreign—Oriental, he thought. And then just after lunch, Regina came.

"I'm in school this year. I go to school." She climbed up on the bench beside him. She had never done this before; though she saw him regularly on Saturdays, she was generally shy and stood at a distance peeking at him through her hair.

"Well, now. Isn't that nice! Do you like school, Regina?"

"Yes. Miss Foley is a big fat lady with teeth like this and she's very nice." Regina made her front teeth protrude in imitation of Miss Foley's.

He laughed and she continued to make the face.

She climbed down from the bench, looked at him a moment, climbed back up and, putting her mouth against his ear, whispered: "I love you," and ran away.

A sweet little girl, he thought. Feeling almost guilty that his life was so full, he closed his eyes and, drowsy in the sun, fell momentarily asleep. He awoke with a start. Afternoon light was pouring through the brown and golden leaves; there was a swan floating on dark waters and beyond the trees the ocean stretched out forever. He heard someone speaking.

Lovelier than April rain or sullen pain's surcease
Is the dark I live: the cool caress of leaves
Against my face in autumn, foam nets the ocean weaves
And casts about my feet, the wild swans crying peace.

The voice was familiar because it was his own. He looked about and then, reassured to find himself alone, laughed softly at his embarrassment. It was a poem, he said. I was reciting a poem. He tried to think where he had heard it, but of course he had not heard it anywhere; he had said it.

Saturday was a full day. He was not able to spend a whole hour at the Tim Keefe garden and only out of deep concern was he able to contemplate the near-ruins of the funeral home. The hippies, people said, had been holding love-ins or smoke-ins or something harmless there and eventually, the place had been gutted by fire. A love-in, he said to himself, and stared with affection at the first floor of the house, since that was all that remained. It would soon be level with the ground and they would make it a parking lot or, more likely, erect a glassy new apartment building which would be nice in its way but not the same as something old and odd and loved for what it had been as well as what it was.

Well, everything passes, oh yes, he said, and returned to his rooms above the food store, where he heated his soup and ate it and waited with no anticipation for his son's visit on the following day.

* * * * * *

When Neil asked him what he had done yesterday, Attix Ransom paused for a moment, thinking. Why should I tell him, he thought. Why should I share something he cannot, for all his lawyer's understanding, grasp at all. That life is not just having . . . and then from nowhere he heard Kathleen's voice saying: "Because he is your son. Because he is our son." And so for Kathleen's sake, he told him.

"Yesterday?" he said. "Yes, oh yes. Let me see, yesterday." He looked into his son's eyes; they were patient and encouraging and loving, but they had already made a decision. He looked at his daughter-in-law, a beautiful

girl once, but hard about the mouth now. She was flicking bits of imaginary lint from her fashionably long skirt. "Yesterday," he said again. They are my children, our children. I will give them the only thing I have left.

"Yesterday, like all the days this fall, was perfect. After I had cleaned the house and kissed your mother, because I miss her son, because I love her, I left for the park. My park. It was fresh and alive there. In fall nothing dies, everything changes, and everything in the park was changing right before my eyes. The trees, the beautiful trees, and the cool caress of leaves against my face, the swans were singing, crying peace and peace and then the Jesuit came by. We are going to have a picnic when the house is down. Not to rejoice, you understand, oh no, but to cheer each other up. He's growing a beard and will bring some wine, sweet wine, and we will drink it in the park to cheer each other up.

"It was the same when your mother died. I understand. You can live with only so much loss and then you turn to anything. Anything at all. He turned to me, the young man, the poor sad priest, and he said 'when they've destroyed it completely, I'll join you here for lunch and we can cheer each other up.' You would understand if you could see him. His eyes. I don't know what he has seen but all the light in them is gone. But that was the sad part.

"There were other things. The girl came by, so sweet with her long hair and her smile. Regina. She told me that she loved me and, do you know, she does. A little girl. The corgis, going to Harvard. And the Orientals played croquet, a noisy group, but happy and alive with the soft wind and the leaves falling.

"Later I went by the garden. The carousel horse made me think of when you were little, Neil, and we were at the circus, at a gambling booth, and suddenly a gun went off, I said to your mother, 'Grandfather has shot himself and we are ruined.' But ruin isn't ever what it seems. Never. And we went home. So I didn't stay very long at the garden but thought about the house instead.

"Your thoughts ramble, you know, when you get old, and I was thinking of the house. The columns and the stained glass and next door diamonds trinkling from the bullfrog's perch. It was sad, torn down for a love-in, or whatever it is they do. I came home and warmed my soup, thinking I will have some sweet wine with the Jesuit who is mad, poor young man, who needs someone to have wine with and a grinder."

Attix Cornelius Ransom stopped then and smiled at his son and his daughter-in-law.

"Well," he said, "there you are. That is all there is."

They said goodbye to the old man and when they reached Hartford made arrangements for St. Luke's Home for the Aged to take the poor old soul, which they agreed to do within the week.

* * * * * * *

They came for him on Thursday. He had not gone to the park since Monday morning when they had called to tell him he would be admitted to the Home that week. Nor had he eaten. He had sat at the window of his

bedroom looking out over the park and watching the daily destruction of the funeral home.

I am leaving forever, he thought. I will never see the park again. And he never did.

Thursday was difficult for everyone. Neither Neil nor his wife spoke on the trip up to Cambridge, both feeling somehow guilty. They were convinced they were doing the right thing; still, it made them uncomfortable.

As for Attix himself, he had brooded for the past three days about the poor young Jesuit who would be looking for him on Sunday and would not find him in the park. When his son arrived, he explained this but to no effect since Neil kept assuring him that the priest would understand. Mr. Ransom, broken, shook his head and climbed into the car.

The house was finally razed on Saturday. On Sunday the Jesuit, nervous but smiling and armed with an hour's conversation, waited with his bottle of sweet wine. The young priest, who for months had been taking therapeutic walks at his psychiatrist's insistence and who for the first time in his life had proposed a meeting with another human being, waited for two hours and then went home, where in the privacy of his room he succumbed to the nervous breakdown that had been so long imminent. But by this time both Attix and his son were preoccupied with other things.

The heavy car swung on to Massachusetts Avenue and from there on to a series of turnpikes that would take them quickly and efficiently to the nursing home. There was no conversation. In the back seat Attix continued with himself the dialogue of the past three days, asking himself what would happen to him and where he was going.

Sun was pouring in the window against which his head bobbed as he drifted into sleep. The sun. The beautiful sun making swans sing in the trees and the ocean ribbed with foam but stretching out to where the sea went black until Regina came walking across the water to him, climbed into his lap and whispered 'I love you.' And then the Jesuit was there, smiling, sad. 'I've brought you wine, sweet wine, because the house is down.'

'Yes. Oh yes,' Attix said, 'that will cheer us up. But I can't stay. I'd like to stay, but I can't.'

'Where are you going?' the Jesuit said, and he was angry.

'Didn't you know? I thought you would know,' the old man said. 'I have to die. I'm dying.'

When the car pulled up to a smart stop in front of the nursing home and the Head Sister came down the steps to welcome the distinguished lawyer's father, they were all surprised to find him dead, his hands folded as if in prayer, a radiant smile upon his face.

"Why, he looks just like that poet," the Sister said, but she could not remember which one.

Mother Political

• Stephen Berg

Now I need to forget the pages I can't forget and can't read again
where it says men kill men, men are political forever, life,
our life, a leaflet in the third person, floats into the city streets,
are you listening? On which page does it say You know your life enough?
on which page can you find Do this, Not that! Free everyone because
you know enough, on which page is the truth wonderful like your first word?
Mother of my mother, clay, sky, this is not a poem, this is not
the ninth page of a book, this is not me or you or a river,
this is not the seventieth bullet that tore through Lorca's right shoulder
before he fell, this is not the silence of those lost microscopic poems
Hernandez scratched into his own skin with fingernails that fought walls
and got nowhere with them, with teeth that chewed iron bars,
you can't read them, you can't tell me he said what he said,
because this is how what is never becomes what will be, this is political,
because we're good, we saved everyone, we made mother political,
see her crying when you leave, born for this,
see her laughing in the bathroom to herself when you hit back,
and the bombers are still taking off for Germany, the bombers
still gliding down in Viet Nam, there are still shadows of men vaporized
on walls with their mouths open that the light comes through,
their last words exploded so far back into time
eternity was made longer by them, ferns, memory, clouds, mother so political,
father sitting next to the radio smoking his pipe, you so human,
terrified in bed late at night when the darkness attacked, when
the politicians went down on their knees in the fields of Granada rye
looking for the bullet, measuring how long a kill should last, hosing
the jailcell so not one trace of blood of shit of a man's puke would be left,
and mother so political, us, just us, sitting around, our tiny bird—
mouths open unfed cheeping Not Enough stuffed with pages we can't read—
"they were never there, they were not political, they did not sing,
with this bullet two dead Spanish angels killed all the starving of the world
in their bedrooms because of a girl"—
written so we could sleep political.

The Dilemma of Freedom:
A Note on the Novels of Alexander Solzhenitsyn

• Leo D. Rudnytzky

Since the establishment of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1895, Russia has had four writers singled out for this distinction. Only one of the four, however, Mikhail Sholokhov, a Nobel Prize Winner in 1965 and the author of *The Quiet Don*, was accorded official recogniiton by the Soviet regime. The Nobel Prize brought nothing but persecution and the wrath of the Soviet government to the other writers (Ivan Bunin, 1933; Boris Pasternak, 1958; Alexander Solzhenitsyn, 1970). The fate of the first three poets mentioned is a matter of historical record, whereas Solzhenitsyn's case is far from closed. Nonetheless, I do not intend to dwell on the circumstances which focused the world's attention on Solzhenitsyn, nor to analyze the political significance of the Nobel Prize affair, for that has already been done several times elsewhere. I will limit myself here to a very brief biographical sketch of the author and to an analysis of the motif of freedom found in his three novels, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), *The First Circle* (1964), and *The Cancer Ward* (1967).

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was born in the year of the Revolution, 1918, in Kislovodsk in the Caucasian part of Russia. He studied mathematics and physics at the University of Rostov and later literature, philology, and philosophy through a correspondence course offered by the Philological Department of Moscow University. In 1941 he was drafted into the Soviet army and served as a captain and a battery commander during World War II. In 1945 he was arrested for making remarks against Stalin in his correspondence and was sentenced to eight years of slave labor. In 1953, his sentence was changed to life in exile. During his internment Solzhenitsyn suffered from cancer of the stomach, but the diesase was eventually arrested. In 1957 he was "rehabilitated" by Nikita Krushchev and moved to Ryazan, where he married a chemistry student. In Ryazan he taught mathematics at the local ten-year school and began to write in his spare time. On November 12, 1969, after the publication of his works had appeared in the West, Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Association of the Writers of the Soviet Union for his "anti-Soviet" writings and thus deprived of his livelihood. (The works of a writer expelled from this association cannot be published in the Soviet Union). In addition to the three novels mentioned, Solzhenitsyn is also the author of several short stories, dramas, and essays.

All three novels are characterized by an almost classical adherence

to the unities of time and place. The action of both *One Day* and *The First Circle* takes place in a very confined locale (a concentration camp and a prison) and in a very short time (one day and a little over two days). In *The Cancer Ward* these unities are also present but in a somewhat liberalized form. In addition to this, a definite unity of style characterizes at least the first two novels. The narrative of *One Day* never transcends the limited intellectual horizon of its protagonist, a simple Russian peasant, and consequently the novel does not contain explicit polemical statements nor penetrating intellectual observations. In *The First Circle*, on the other hand, stylistic unity is achieved by the skillful integration of diverse points of view expressed by highly intelligent and articulate scientists and scholars imprisoned at the Mavrino prison near Moscow. *The Cancer Ward* does not display such highly developed stylistic unity. A type of dialectic tension seems to pervade the entire work, for it attempts to be a political and historical novel and simultaneously a psychological work about people who are doomed to die of cancer; somehow these two themes are never completely reconciled.

The symbolism present in all three works is evident. In *One Day* Solzhenitsyn leaves little doubt that the prison camp is nothing but a microcosm of the Soviet Union. The plethora of characters of all nationalities and from all walks of life serves to emphasize this. The entire Soviet empire is a huge concentration camp, a prison isolated from the rest of the world. Similarly, he makes it quite clear that the "first circle" is merely the best and the highest circle of hell, the best of all possible prisons, and there are countless others far more terrible than the prison at Mavrino. And in the same manner "the cancer ward" is representative of the whole country—a body infested by tumors which continue to sprout, a body which is doomed to die, for as Oleg Kostoglotov, the protagonist of *The Cancer Ward* states: "A man sprouts tumors and dies—how, then, can a country live that has sprouted camps and exile?" (Dell edition, p. 601).

The three novels reveal various dimensions of life in the Soviet Union primarily through the different personalities of their protagonists. Ivan Denisovich Shukov is a simple man of peasant origin, adept at surviving in labor camps but without higher aspirations or ambitions. He is unable to comprehend the changes which take place in the outside world and seems to realize subconsciously that after long years of imprisonment he will not be fit for freedom, and yet he yearns for his release and counts the days left in his term. Thus, the ending of the novel strikes a particularly tragic note, when the protagonist, at the end of the long day which reveals all the misery and the trauma of the concentration camp, realizes that, after all, it was a very good day:

> "A day without a dark cloud, almost a happy day. There were three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days like that in his stretch. From the first clang of the rail to the last clang of the rail. Three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days. The three extra days were for leap years." (Signet edition, p. 158).

A more succinct presentation of this dilemma is found in *The First Circle*

when Nadya, the wife of the protagonist, Gleb Nerzhin, while writing to her imprisoned husband, realizes that there is no return from imprisonment:

> "After fourteen years at the front and in prison there would probably not be a single cell of his body left from past. They could only come together all over again. A new, unfamiliar person would walk in bearing the name of her husband, and she would see that the man, her beloved, for whom she had shut herself up to wait for fourteen years, no longer existed, had evaporated, molecule by molecule." (Bantam edition, p. 232).

In *The Cancer Ward* the dilemma of being unfit for freedom is symbolically depicted. Oleg Kostoglotov, for example, is depressed by the sight of animals in captivity upon visiting a zoo subsequent to his release from the hospital. As Solzhenitsyn puts it:

> "The most profound thing about the confinement of these beasts was that Oleg, taking their side, could not have released them, even if he'd had the power to break open their cages, because they had lost, together with their homelands, the idea of natural freedom. The result of their sudden liberation could only be more terrible." (Dell edition, p. 584).

The Cancer Ward appears to be an unedited fragment of a novel, and thus its stylistic unity is, as I have indicated above, not as strictly maintained. In this novel the story is presented mainly from the viewpoints of two diametrically opposed characters: the bureaucratic party official, Rusanov, and the ex-convict and exile, Kostoglotov. Thus the language and the thought pattern of the narrative constantly shift from one pole to another. Yet in a sense both antagonists are on the same level: both suffer from the inexorable presence of cancer, and the tragic sense of life which emanates from this condition supports the thematic unity of the novel.

Of the three works, *The First Circle* has the richest poetic texture. It contains a wealth of diverse elements: essays on literature (e.g. an interpretation of Goethe's *Faust,* Bantam edition, pp. 36-37); literary and political satire (Chapter 50: The Traitor Prince); penetrating psychological insight into the nature of a dictator (Chapters 18-21); thoughts on the nature of communism, on religion, art, and on life in the Soviet Union in general. It is a huge work of 87 chapters; it touches on all aspects of human life and provides innumerable insights into the mystery of the human condition. Its form is a magnificent edifice, comparable to a Byzantine cathedral whose cupolas, although of diverse proportions, extend harmoniously into the sky.

The novel begins on the eve of Christmas, 1949, with a telephone call made by the State Counselor Second Rank Innokenty Volodin to Professor Dobroumov in order to save the latter from arrest, and ends approximately two days later with a description of a prisoner transport through the streets of Moscow. Sandwiched between the two events are innumerable episodes which reveal the trauma of Stalin's reign, as well as descriptions

of the lives and activities of the prisoner braintrust at the Mavrino prison. The ending itself, like that of *One Day*, has a tragic-ironic quality: A French reporter on his way to a hockey match notices the word "Meat" painted in four languages on the side of a camouflaged prison van, and taking out his notebook writes in red ink: "On the streets of Moscow one often sees vans filled with foodstuffs, very neat and hygienically impeccable. One can only conclude that the provisioning of the capital is excellent." (Bantam edition, p. 647) Solzhenitsyn as a final touch stresses, just as many of his literary predecessors did, the ignorance and the naiveté of the westerner regarding true conditions in Russia and underscores the complete isolation of the modern *homo sovieticus*.

Solzhenitsyn's work displays none of the usual excesses committed by many contemporary western writers: indulgence in the absurd, experimentation to the point of disintegration, preoccupation with sex, perversions, etc. Solzhenitsyn takes note of horrible events laconically with the detachment and objectivity of a mathematician and introduces moral ideals and moral absolutes without pathos, in the manner of understatement. His works are thus markedly different in their range from those written in the West, including the nouveau roman experimental and its by-products. His first hand experience with Stalinism, a keen perception of man's suffering, and the courage to be authentic are the main sources of his creativity and factors which tend to make him unique among the writers of today. Solzhenitsyn confronts the age old problem of man's freedom much more openly than his western colleagues, including Camus and Sartre. The concept of freedom in Solzhenitsyn's works is revealed gradually through the sequential progression of facts and events; it is presented through the narrative *per se*, rather than by means of symbolism, abstraction, or stylistic devices. This is particularly true of *The First Circle*, where various episodes of the work that treat of freedom are juxtaposed in an almost dialectic fashion. The threat of freedom hangs over every prisoner at Mavrino, just as the threat of imprisonment is ever-present to the people outside. The scientists in the first circle are imprisoned as human beings, yet they are free as scientists to pursue their work; whereas their guards, who are free men, are infected by the constant fear of imprisonment and the possibility of being sent to the last circle of hell. In this respect, every human being in the Soviet Union, from the lowest of peasants to the mighty dictator himself, is a prisoner and unfree, and his location—outside or inside a slave labor camp—is, as such, of little significance. For, as Solzhenitsyn puts it: "Unfortunately for people—and fortunately for their rulers—a human being is so constituted that as long as he lives there is always something more that can be taken away from him." (Bantam edition, p. 636). Thus paradoxically the only free people in the Soviet Union are those who have lost everything, who cannot be threatened anymore with any kind of privation, nor tempted with the promise of a false, apparent freedom. This is pointed out again and again in the novel. The prisoner Bobynin, in speaking to his jailer, the Minister of State Security Abakumov, says:

"Just understand one thing and pass it to anyone at the

> top who still doesn't know that you are strong only as long as you don't deprive people of *everything*. For a person you've taken *everything* from is no longer in your power. He is free all over again." (Bantam edition, p. 96; italics by Solzhenitsyn).

It is precisely this dilemma which confronts another prisoner, Dmitri Alexandrovich Sologdin. He brings an engineering design for inspection to the mathematician in residence, Professor, Chelnov, another prisoner in "the first circle." Upon careful inspection of the design the professor assures the eager inventor that the project is indeed the best one submitted and that it will give him freedom and "the annulment of his conviction." (Bantam edition, p. 203). During the ensuing discussion, however, it becomes more and more apparent that freedom is too great a luxury for a prisoner, that to become free is, strictly speaking, to go from one form of imprisonment to another. Thus Sologdin, as Solzhenitsyn puts it, "had come into this room a free contender. And now he left it as a burdened victor. He was no longer the master of his own time, intentions, or labor." (Bantam edition, p. 204). Many times throughout the novel life in prison is compared favorably with the existence outside. Nerzhin, for example, says during a birthday celebration in the prison: "This is happiness we have right now—a free banquet, an exchange of free thoughts without fear, without concealment—we didn't have that in freedom." Another prisoner, Adamson, agrees and adds: "Yes, as a matter of fact, freedom itself was quite often lacking in freedom." (Bantam edition, p. 370).

Life in prison such as that of the "the first circle" affords the inmates the opportunity to think, which they did not have while they were free. In prison they are able to contemplate things and to come to terms with the riddles of life. At one point in the narrative Gleb Nerzhin utters: "thank God for prison! It gave me the chance to think." (Bantam edition, p. 38). And somewhat later he says: "'For those who understand, human happiness is suffering." (Bantam edition, p. 39). In this type of prison the complete spiritualization of the individual is possible and this is the ultimate step to freedom in the process of man's liberation from his captivity.

A far more tragic fate faces the wives of the prisoners. Although they are on the outside and thus strictly speaking free, their lot is not an easy one. They are constantly torn by existential alternatives: life as a faithful nonentity (neither wife nor divorcee nor widow), on the one hand, and life as a streetwalker, on the other. For some of them, their marital fidelity becomes a prison house, far more terrible than the prison which contains their husbands, and the pressures exerted by state and society intensify their sufferings (Bantam edition, p. 240, p. 263, and others). This explains why Nadya, the wife of the protagonist, Gleb Nerzhin, insists that her imprisoned husband be unfaithful to her (Bantam edition, p. 242); she realizes the terrible power of the human conscience as a prison and wants to set both herself and her husband free.

The circumstances prevailing in the Soviet Union create an atmosphere in which human beings are from their very beginnings psychologically conditioned for imprisonment. It seems that the "passivity of

prison" (Bantam edition, p. 636) is latent in every Soviet citizen. The best example of this is Innokenty Volodin's quick adjustment to prison subsequent to his arrest. After a while he finds being arrested "by no means as fearsome as he had imagined it would be while waiting for it." As a matter of fact, he finds that he is relieved and almost happy when it finally comes to pass. It would seem that the Soviet man is never really at peace with himself and the world until he finally finds repose in prison. This then is the feeling experienced by Innokenty.

> "There was even a feeling of relief. There was nothing more to fear, nothing more to fight against, no more need to pretend. He had the numbing and pleasant relief which takes possession of the body of a wounded soldier." (Bantam edition, p. 608).

And:

> "He was experiencing the sweet indifference of a man slowly freezing to death in the snow." (Bantam edition, p. 622).

And yet a sudden exposure to freedom has a shocking, intoxicating effect even on the most hardened prisoner. The radio engineer and former German POW, Valentine Martynich Pryanchikov, while being transported for questioning to the Minister Abakumov, is so completely overcome by the sight of people walking on the streets of nighttime Moscow, that he is almost totally bereft of his senses (Bantam edition, p. 91). Even he must eventually realize that it is only an apparent freedom that lures him, and herein lies, in the final analysis, intrinsic tragic frustration.

True freedom, it seems, does not exist in the Soviet Union, nor would it be tolerated if it did exist. In the shades of Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor, Solzhenitsyn presents the old adage of dictators voiced here by a skeptic prisoner during a discussion: "Freedom would be the end of mankind. Alas, only the bludgeon can show them [the masses] the truth." (Bantam edition, p. 70). The Soviet man, it appears, is limited to three existential alternatives which Pushkin once postulated in his verse and which Solzhenitsyn quotes in *The Cancer Ward*:

> In this, our age of infamy,
> Man's choice is but to be
> A tyrant, traitor, prisoner;
> No other choice has he. (Dell edition, p. 103).

And yet there is another choice, the choice of being a revolutionary, as Solzhenitsyn brings out in the conversation between Innokenty Volodin and the writer Nikolai Galakhov. In discussing contemporary Soviet literature and the nature of literature in general, Volodin makes the following revolutionary remark: ". . . a great writer—forgive me, perhaps I shouldn't say this, I'll lower my voice—a great writer is, so to speak, a second government. That's why no regime anywhere has ever loved its great writers, only its minor ones." (Bantam edition, p. 415). It is here, when Solzhenitsyn comes to terms with the function of the artist, that the need for absolute freedom is reasserted. The artist's crucial function is to be a bearer of a message; he must have some truth to communicate to his

fellow man (for aesthetic form alone is not enough), and this he must do in the spirit of absolute freedom. This freedom of creation is as essential in art as it is in life, for the two are inseparable in all great writers. Solzhenitsyn is conscious of his messianic mission as a poet. The poet, this suspect second government, must strive to engage man in the struggle against tyranny and remind him of his incontestable claim to freedom. His work, therefore, must be a weapon in man's struggle against evil, against all oppression and tyranny. The poet, thus, is an autonomous moral authority, and as such, independent of all political parties and governments. It is here in his conception of artistic freedom that Solzhenitsyn's work becomes politically dangerous for the Soviet regime.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn's work is steeped in the best 19th century Russian novelistic tradition. His characters display a spiritual kinship with those of Pushkin, Gogol, and Turgenev, and his narrative artistry is a synthesis of Tolstoy's epic sweep and Dostoyevsky's spiritual dimension. In all three novels, and particularly in *The First Circle*, an almost mathematical or scientific order is present, which is not imposed from outside. The various generic forms present in the novel blend into a single unified poetic statement. Reality, so to speak, composes itself out of innumerable variants and versions.

From a reading of the English translations, one may not readily appreciate the power of Solzhenitsyn's language. The Russian idiom used in his works vitalizes the language which had been spoken to death by the adherents of socialistic realism. Solzhenitsyn does this by imbuing it with various new linguistic elements, such as Ukrainisms, Russian colloquialisms as spoken by the non-Russians, by the use of atypical understatements, and by occasional vulgarisms. He revolutionizes the language by asserting once again the sacred right of the poet, denied to him ever since Stalin came to power, the right to portray man's suffering and to champion the cause of those imprisoned and persecuted. Solzhenitsyn accomplishes for the Russian literature of today that which Dostoyevsky accomplished for it in the 19th century.

Finally, like Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*, Solzhenitsyn's works are intended as a revelation for the peoples of the Soviet Union, but ironically, just like Pasternak's work, both *The First Circle* and *The Cancer Ward*, are destined, at least temporarily, to be read in the West alone.

Two Poems by Michael Lally

The Swimmers

for my brother John: b. 1939 d. 1939

Final Event:
I feel your eyes

This is the race for losers
before they leave

before they remove the area
before their eyes as round and hot as the sun
their tongues somehow docile on their white chins

Everyone
the time of the losers

Even false *finishes* allowed
The scorekeeper is through

the timer gives his wife back his watch
the starter looks off at his children and walks away stuffing his gun

Under the water
we talk

And Yes

Recovering from the
back of your knees,
the back of your neck,
the tight curls everywhere.

I stand up, on my own,
offer to take your hand.
Alot of mumbling behind
your body as it rises,
alot of whispering in
between your thighs.

How is it we have come
to communicate with so
much of the things we
thought would die first,
Maybe this is death? Or
maybe this is dying . . .

The Tears on the Face of Persephone

• Jean Seitter Cummins

The cafe tables cast long shadows in the sun. She blinked her pale lashes and reached in her net bag for a floppy straw hat to protect her English skin.

The Roman sun was like a great, all-seeing eye, she had decided. An eye with a stare as bold and direct as the young ragazzi whose sizzling *psst-psst*'s seemed to come from every doorway.

On another level she considered the phallic significance of the sun's rays, strong, piercing, direct, marking at first with a blush and later a sophisticated tan the skin of the impregnated. This hat then was the symbol of her virginity, a shield to save her from the ardor of Apollo.

> May you never, no never behold me
> Sharing the couch of a god,
> And may none of the dwellers of heaven
> Draw near to me ever . . .

She wondered briefly if she were going mad. These long walks in the afternoon sun, perhaps were as bad as the clerk indicated with rapid shakes of his serious little head each time she strode through the lobby.

More than likely it was her age, Miss Proctor reasoned. She had probably reached the "difficult time" she had read about, life's last cruel joke on the spinster, the last stand of banked emotions, when ardor soars to the heights while physical attractiveness levels off considerably.

If this were so, then why was Mavis immune? Why did her plump, middle-aged companion rest behind drawn blinds in their room at the villa while she prowled the streets, awaiting, yet fearing the stares, calls and occasional jostles of the arrogant young cocks who strutted around the square, pecking at the world with glittering eyes.

But Mavis with her seamed hose and sensible shoes was blind to all the possibilities of Rome, except as they affected the thirty 14-year-old girls entrusted to their care for the annual school holiday.

"Not easy to ride herd on a bunch of young girls, with those Eye-talian blokes swaggering about, leering at them." Miss Proctor had felt herself blush while on a more respectable level, she wondered where Mavis had ever picked up an expression like "riding herd." She said, rather edgily, "Mavis, they're only children." At just that unpropitious moment, Audrey Henly had slithered by in what must have been last year's black skirt. Mavis had raised her eyebrows and said nothing.

There was nothing really to say, Miss Proctor thought to herself,

returning for the moment to the rather unpleasant reality of the sun-baked cafe and the too-sweet lemonade on the table in front of her. And nothing to do—she glanced at her watch—except return to the hotel and dress for dinner.

Dinner with Mavis spattering her shirt with sauce in an effort to roll her spaghetti authentically—"when in Rome, you know." And the girls chattering all around them, a few smiling to themselves and holding their heads just so, certain that the kitchen boys were watching.

Dinner. She gathered up her things and prepared to leave the cafe, carefully avoiding the eyes of the man at the next table. Who probably hadn't even been looking, she realized as she moved out into the street, her camera banging against her side as she strode along.

The next day they visited the Villa Borghese. It had rained all morning but the sun was out by the time their touring bus reached the villa. The girls streamed into the galleria adding their voices to the international swell that surged through the turnstile and into the foyer with its rainy day museum smell.

Here they reassembled and set off in hand-holding pairs under the direction of Mr. Santalugia, a heavy-featured Italian who smelled of cheap cologne and sweat.

"That one comes on a bit strong," Mavis commented as she fell into step beside her. Miss Proctor smiled uneasily and edged away, filled with a sudden unreasoning fear that Mavis would somehow catch her hand begin skipping and swinging arms as they moved through the room. In a moment she had steadied herself enough to reply that she supposed it was the climate.

Her eyes followed the girls, moving in hand-locked pairs behind the guide. Italian women of all ages linked arms in the streets and managed to convey an air of congeniality, but their way of joining good British hands was guarded and adolescent.

In her mind's eye she could see them moving like a string of paper dolls through the streets and galleries of Rome, escaping impressionless and odor-free from the jostling, sweating masses that pressed against them.

The galleria itself was a succession of pictures and statues she was sure she had seen before. As they trouped from room to room, she found it increasingly difficult to concentrate on either the "art treasures" or Mr. Santalugia, who spoke in syllables rather than words.

While her feet shuffled and regrouped before yet another white-limbed nymph with water jar, her spirit disrobed and joined in the classical fun of romping through wooded glens carelessly draped in filmy gauze which by rights should have given her a dreadful chest cold. She felt her flat spinster's breasts lifting and burgeoning while her hips rounded to the shape of the ever-popular water jar. So hot in pursuit were the various satyrs, centaurs and assorted Romani that she had no time to even clutch at her filmy drape as she streaked through the woods, ignoring the little British voice in the back of her mind that warned her to dress warmly or she'd surely catch her death.

"You're a million miles away."

She stared at Mavis dully like someone shaken out of a deep sleep.

Mavis laughed indulgently. "I said the girls don't seem to be getting anything from this place but the giggles."

"I imagine they're too young for all of this—" she made a sweeping gesture that took in all the desultory, classical flesh, draped and undraped, with or without water jars, pipes or wooded glens—"art," she finished simply.

Moments later the giggling ceased as the girls rounded a corner and confronted the single piece of sculpture for which the gallery was famous. "Soocha eenterest," Mr. Santalugia would say to her later in discussing the sudden cessation of conversation and the open-mouthed interest with which the girls viewed *The Rape of Persephone.*

The grouping showed an agitated young girl writhing politely in the grasp of a bearded assailant. Persephone's hair was done in the usual classical knot. The corners of her mouth drooped to show she was unhappy with the embrace of Pluto who appeared not so much lustful as amused.

Cast as she was in the conventional mold, much of her agitation must have come from the fact that she was unable to make that gesture so natural to well-bred Roman statuary. She could not even clutch at her drape as it dropped below her hips.

"If she wanted to be left alone, why did she dress like that," one practical girl with glasses inquired loudly of her companion. Still no one could deny the two marble tears dribbling down from staring eyes.

Miss Proctor shivered. There was nothing about this sentimental exercise in classicism to move her except the virgin's eternal interest in the subject of rape. It was a bond between them, all of them, even Mavis, standing in a silent, open-mouthed circle, gazing at the statue, recalling their deepest fears and possibly hopes.

Pluto was not necessarily cruel and leering, the rugged head was simply knowing and somehow inevitable, like the way of the flesh. Was that why Persephone cried? Because the enemy was both without and within?

His embrace was encompassing but not brutal. The hands at her waist would not bruise the marble flesh. What was it then about his face and solid, well-made body to bring tears to flesh so exquisitely formed for love. The prospect, not of violence, but of knowledge. Carnal knowledge, infused in a burning, struggling encounter that made young girls wise and stamped creases on the faces of black-shawled Mediterranean matrons. The Burden. The heavy burden of the flesh. It was this and not Pluto that dragged her down. The sheer weight of her overblown woman's hip caused her fall.

She remembered oddly that Persephone had been close to her mother. We have reason to believe, ma'am, that your daughter was carried off by the king of the underworld. From certain marks on the ground and the location of her cloak, we have deduced that it was her weakness rather than her abductor's strength which made the attack possible.

"There is no such thing as rape." Who'd said that? Probably some fresh-faced pimpky youth she had encountered briefly during adolescence. It had the suspicious ring of "you know you like it."

Out of the corner of her eye, she sensed rather than saw Audrey Henly move away from the group. She turned to find her quietly regarding a painting on the wall. Next to her stood a dark slender boy in a turquoise sport shirt. They did not speak nor appear to be aware of each other. Still their bodies were placed somehow in relation to each other. The hands hanging innocently at their sides seemed in orbit to each other, drawn by some gravitational pull.

Mis Proctor shook her head and stepped quickly out of the circle. "Come girls, there's still the gardens to see."

They were strangely, blessedly quiet as they stepped out into the bright light of late afternoon. The air was steamy and heavy with the scent of flowers. Miss Proctor suppressed a yawn.

Mavis quickly took charge. "Come along girls, the garden has many paths and we don't want to miss any of them."

Miss Proctor dragged herself wearily along, "guarding the rear" as Mavis called it, always with a deep chuckle.

Audrey, too, lagged behind, stopping innocently enough to sniff at each new flower. From a side path, Miss Proctor thought she caught a flash of turquoise.

The main path wound in and out, breaking occasionally on an expanse of garden where flowers of every conceivable color and scent waved dizzily in the sun. Here and there it gave way to little hedge-bound plots with carved stone benches and moss-lined water fountains with sluggish streams of tepid water which, if sampled, only made the throat drier.

"It's about time for us to encounter un grande soft drink kiosk," Mavis edged over to her, wiping her red face with a handkerchief. "It's not the heat you know, it's the damned humidity. Yes, I predict that over the next hill—'Bevete Coca-Cola Molte lire.' "

Miss Proctor smiled wryly. The black-topped path felt soft and sticky underfoot. The girls straggled on listlessly. She recognized a shrub but couldn't summon up the energy to point it out to them. Silently they weaved along, somnambulists in a lush dream of mediterrannan excess.

Then over the next hill they encountered the refreshment stand. The girls gasped and almost broke into a run in their haste to reach the ancient stone terrace with its odd assortment of dilapidated garden furniture. "The Borghese's would have been proud," said Mavis as she heaved herself into an unsturdy-looking chair. A white-jacketed waiter hurried over, urging tiny dishes of gelati at astronomical prices.

To his dismay they ordered tea. "Best thing for you on a hot day," Mavis announced chattily then turned toward the other tables. "Careful, girls, nothing with ice." The waiter cast her a dark look as he moved on to take the other orders.

A little stone satyr hopped about in wicked delight on a pedestal at the side of their table. "Wish I knew where he gets his pep." Mavis fanned herself with her guide book.

Miss Proctor smiled slightly as she closed her eyes and stretched her legs discreetly under the wrought iron table. "'Know what?" Mavis continued.

"M-m-m?" she muttered still stretching.

"I don't see Audrey."

"You don't—" her eyes shot open and scanned the tables around them. "Perhaps she's in the—"

"Dont be silly," Mavis waved her aside. "They use the bushes here. I had to steer my girls away from a man who was—"

"But she was right behind us!"

"That was your half of the caravan."

"Well she can't be far away. I mean all these paths lead to the same place, don't they?"

Mavis shrugged her shoulders and flipped through the guide book. ". . . and the winding paths of the Villa Borghese terminate in a little lake crowned by a temple to Aesculapius executed by the sculptor Somebody-or-other."

She sighed and pushed herself up. "You drink my tea. I'll go track down Audrey. If I'm not back in 20 minutes, we'll meet you at the temple or whatever."

"All right. Sorry, luv. But that was your half of the group."

Miss Proctor smiled mechanically and turned away. The kiosk was in a sort of valley. If Audrey had merely fallen behind, she would be visible from the top of the slope. Then again if she hadn't . . . All those lonely little side paths. All those clumps of bushes. Miss Proctor lengthened her stride. She was nearly panting when she reached the crest of the hill. The broad path was empty, vibrating in the heat. The crowds had disappeared.

Perhaps the earth had opened and swallowed her up. "Mrs. Henly, we have reason to believe that Audrey has been spirited away by the king of the underworld." She smiled. Maybe the girl had just sat down some place and fallen asleep.

Miss Proctor turned down a side path. It was heavily shaded with trees and much cooler and darker than the main one. Unconsciously she began looking for a flash of turquoise.

She rounded a corner and the path narrowed to a hedge-lined corridor. In a small recess she stumbled on two middle aged lovers leisurely entwined on a small bench. The man held the woman's face like a delicate flower with one hand while the other moved matter of factly under her skirt. A satyr's head emerged from the stone above, dirt streaked and merry.

She tried to retrace her steps but found she was wandering from left to right in confusion. The way that had seemed so broad and straight was now honeycombed with little outlets leading nowhere.

In one of these she encountered a little old man who looked like Picasso sitting with his cane between his legs. He gazed at her steadily, tipping his hat as she hurried by, his little goat face twisted into a smile.

Her hose caught on a low branch. Savagely she pulled herself free and broke into a run.

"Midway in life's journey I went astray"—her mind refused to keep to the path she was following—"and woke to find myself alone in a dark wood."

Miss Proctor stumbled along the path as it veered to the right and ended abruptly on the shore of the little lake.

The water lay calm and green in the sun. A man and woman strolled by and stopped for a moment to stare. She heard the word "Inglese" as they moved on chattering and laughing.

She smoothed her skirt, pushed the damp hair back from her face and began walking towards the temple at the water's edge.

God, how she must look! Her hose were ruined. What a fool she was, crashing around in the hedges, just a few feet from the main path all along.

The temple proved to be an overdone shrine flanked by little fountains. A young girl sat on one of the ledges, her face buried in her hands.

"Audrey?" Miss Proctor drew nearer. "Audrey?"

The girl looked up, startled. Her face looked hot and flushed and very young.

"Audrey." Miss Proctor began sternly until she realized the child had been crying. Her dress was torn at the sleeve and there were grass stains on her skirt.

"Miss Proctor, I—" Audrey began to cry again and Miss Proctor placed a hand on her shoulder. "That's all right," she said patting her awkwardly. "That's all right, Audrey, I know.'

Fat little stone boys cavorted on goat feet in the center of the fountain while along its sides, giant fish mouths spewed rusty water into a pool littered with orange peel and candy wrappers.

Campus

• **William Stuckey**

A student passes,
bearing a shaggy flag
of hair. I deep behind,
putting polished shoes down
on dominoes of concrete. Head
up, he pads along, a bear in dungarees.
I raise my knees higher than I mean to.

At the "Keep-Off" sign, we
part. He takes the short
cut, a path like a frayed arrow
straight to the classroom door.
I go the charted route: an arc of brick
that takes me past a man-made thicket
and a pine tree bent to its own
inclination.

Two Poems by Robert Anschuetz

Rembrandt

Imagination should be
Buttoned down, like the vest
On a thick burgher's chest.
It should heave and stretch
As reality heaves and stretches,
And slowly, at times, remove itself
With the deliberate unpinnings
Of a knobby, fumbling hand.
And yet, for all this
Refractoriness, it should be craved . . .
For grace, for the softness and gleam
Of style, the chastening of the forward breast.

An Orange or Two

It is Christmas Eve, but though
The stockings jut—
The rotund bush
Bursts in pride of glistening balls and spangles, still—
The proper feel is not at hand.
The children spill their blocks in listless lobs, though three times
I've stacked a solid structure.
Over their shiny new train
They make continuous fuss.
I ask my wife whether the Christmas idylls
Of long ago had base, whether the children then
Smiled like moons, and moved devotion with their eyes;
Or whether a single wooden cat or dog
Provoked a genuine grin.
She tells me that it was probably so, but that now
Not even the snow falls for Christmas. We
Quickly dismiss the notion we'd
Had a month before
To make the scene this night at the Protestant Church
Which glistened down the road like a ghost
In a moonstruck cornfield.
We give the notion up, because the rime
Which put an edge on things then, which perked
Up our spirits is gone . . . Outside, the evening is balmy,
And in the driveway wheel ridges lapse
Into pools. We make up our minds to pass
The next Christmas in Florida. The kids,
We swear, will only get an orange or two.

Two Poems by John Druska

grey men sit in windows
and watch, nights,
the passing of the wind
about the moon.
the tv glows blue behind
them, in some houses
wives, asleep, are wound
in an armchair
tapestry.
against the attic panes
trees raise their arms
and rattle
in shadow
the passing of the wind.
at their roots
mushrooms like white
cancer grow.

The Cricket

I listen to the crickets turn
my touch to echo
in the head; grow ghoul
and chant the ground I go
to find you.
now I lie beneath a bush,
rubbing my legs together.

Your Turn in the Jungle

• Isabel Bourgoyne

That bathroom, Martha thought, looking from her room towards the closed bathroom door, was the most extravagant of her mother's ideas. Leaves, painted onto the white plaster, climbed across the ceiling to make a green canopy over the tub, turned where wall met ceiling and dangled from veins whose ends curled around the hot and cold water taps. Bromeliads, a pallid spray of orchids, bright stars of impatiens shone through the giant ferns and the philodendrons. With the window blind pulled down, the room glowed with light reflected from the jungle greenery; with the blind up, the winter sun threw a white sheen so that in the big mirror above the basin, Martha Wheeler could see her face colored like that of a character in a science fiction movie. "It's a terrible light to see yourself in," her mother admitted. "It should have been done in pink, with no leaves at all. The little wrinkles in my face wouldn't have shown so much. But you'll have to agree that it's nice to see orchids when it's ten below zero outside." Then, because Mrs. Summerwell liked a measure of glamour in her life, painted copies of invitations she had received in the past years, were arranged down one side of the mirror. "Princess Rostov . . . in honor of the Crown Prince of Norway." And: "Molly Craig and Margaret McPhail . . . to meet Madame de Bessières of Paris." Mrs. Summerwell appreciated the skill involved in the execution of the bathroom's trompe-l'oeils. They had been meticulously painted by a man who had exhibited at the Museum and who had an international reputation.

But the door was opening and Martha's step-father, Bernard, the man her mother had married in her later middle age, emerged, drawing his silk polka dotted dressing gown around him. He had got used to the bathroom after coming to live in his new wife's apartment, although he thought a room of that kind wasn't for a man's use and he doubted whether it were for a woman's either—not the kind of woman he knew. It was a stunt. "You might as well hear 'Come Back to Sorrento' each time you flush the toilet," he said to Martha. "It's the sort of thing the Italians or the French would do. But then . . ." hunching his shoulders in good humor, "your mother seems to like the tropics." The tropics were a place where Negroes with seventy-seven teeth and wearing Persian lamb wigs swung from the trees. He meant it as a joke.

Sensing her indulgence of him, he appealed to Martha on her brief trips home in these last years, to right those characteristics in her mother that made him uneasy. Mrs. Summerwell used to call him a conservative prejudiced old man—teasingly and because she liked something to push against. She thought him kindly and unselfish, which he was. And Bernard could forgive her because inspite of her foolishness, she was solidly of

the Old Guard, born into the Mountain, as they said in the city; while his family, although respectable (he seldom referred to them) had been less successful and had led their lives with less money and flair. He could do his part by reminding her of values by which, when all was said and done, even with jungle weeds in the bathroom, she regulated her life. The trouble was that she was too muleheaded to admit it.

"Your turn in the jungle," he said now to Martha, the sparse white moustache bristling like a snow storm above his straight mouth. Small eyes looked out at her. "Don't forget, we only have twenty minutes before parade." He had been in the army. He laughed at himself for the expressions he still used but was nostalgic for the old code.

She relaxed in the hot water of the bath and looked above her. Steam had accumulated near the ceiling and drops ran down the leaves in shining streaks. How good it was after those years of living in France to have all the hot water she wanted and to be able to sit comfortably in winter without a chill clutching her ankles. Everything here was familiar: the city with its gray stone houses from whose roofs icicles hung in rows of teeth; the view of the white River; the sharp wind against her heavy coat.

"Are you going to stay there? Settle back into the Mountain?" Richard had asked.

Starting from the foundations of the house in the foothills behind the Riviera, lines of carnations had sloped down the hill, stopping above the scattered houses near the sea and the gray tufts of minosa trees. In winter, sitting on the porch outside her bedroom, the sun was hot enough for her to use only a sweater.

"No, I'm going back for a visit. I won't stay."

"Because you're still rebelling?"

She had put her face against his side in sentimentality and with tenderness but not with real love. They had lived in the three rooms for what seemed a long time although it had been only for the warm months of fall. "No, I'm not rebelling, although it may have taken me longer to grow up than most people."

"Can't fight any more?" he'd said. In that case, she might as well be dead. "So you'll just buckle under, forget the bohemian interlude and some day, in a weak mood, tell your twenty year-old daughter that you too once had your slice of life?"

She tried to stick to the point. "No, I won't stay. No good."

"Why is it no good?"

She remembered something as he was talking to her. It was a memory of herself and her brother walking, the woollen pullovers on her legs itching, the knees catching against the hem of her coat. They entered the apartment where her mother and Bernard were now living but which at that time, had belonged to her grandmother. It was the same bathroom, except that the rain forests hadn't yet made their appearance. She had spilled her dessert. The grief of it had shaken her, seeing the flowered plate with its hump of half-liquid ice cream spin from the table and land face down on the rug.

"Just because it's no good," she had said to Richard. "And there is an alternative to rebelling or simply buckling down."

It was impossible to think about him, lying as she was now in the bath, with her mother's initialed towels hanging from the rack and the scent of sweet soap rising with the steam.

How clean she felt coming out of that bath and putting on a dress she knew her mother and Bernard liked. She closed the zipper and combed her hair, which she had cut and set. Her legs felt thin and agile going down the hall to the front door, her flesh soft from the heat of the water.

"You should wear your brooch on the left side, not the right," Bernard said when he had looked at her.

"Isn't that just for men who wear medals?" Martha asked, wanting to humor him.

He shrugged. "Perhaps. But I always thought that women . . ." and here he pulled in his lips to mock what he was saying: "I always thought that women who knew something from something, who knew—wore their brooches on the left side. Be a good girl and change it." It was the kind of directive he would have given his men during the War; not precisely an order but strong advice. Discipline has to be maintained if one agrees to having an army at all.

She undid the pin and changed it to the left side. His tall figure, set back on its heels because of the weight of a small stomach, carried like a knapsack strapped to the front of him, stood so close to her that she thought of her father. She wanted to reach out to him, playfully and with affection. But he was apart from her. He'd made it clear when he married her mother.

Mrs. Summerwell proceeded Martha and Bernard from the taxi and entered the restaurant the way a well handled yacht finds its way to a berth. Wind never lacked, the sails filled with a steady breeze. With her strong white hair, she caught the eye.

There were scampi and oysters and lobsters brought by waiters whose faces Martha couldn't remember although she had seen them many times. The room began to waver and buckle as air does above the hot surface of a road in summer, until she saw the people and tables in miniature, very precisely, just as she had when as a child, she had been taken to this same restaurant in her good clothes.

Bernard talked over his drink. He was arranging the activities of the next day with his wife. Mrs. Summerwell, who bought and sold antique furniture and occasionally decorated the rooms for which they had been acquired, had a job that would take her to the east end of the city, to an auction and then to a meeting with a buyer. She didn't need to work and Bernard wasn't convinced by her insistence that she would be bored sitting in the apartment with nothing to do. He went to the club every day and ate lunch with his friends. Martha's mother had got him interested in charity work and a society for the preservation of the city's old buildings.

He kept eyeing Martha as she ate.

"Bernard, how's cribbage these days? Still gambling?" she asked with masculine jocularity.

"He goes down every day and plays with the old boys," her mother said.

"I asked Bernard," Martha said, coaxing him with her smile. For a brief second, he moved his shoulder as though to raise an arm and put it around her.

"Your mother's never home so that I have to do something with my time," he said, with quick explosive laughter.

Mrs. Summerwell took his hand and held it for a moment. But no one can expect to be married more than once. She had known it when she became a widow; and again, when she married Bernard.

They had finished the scampi when Bernard leaned forward over the table. Martha felt him floating, restless and unsatisfied, and she thought what she could do to make it easier for him. She touched him on the arm, about to begin a joke about her mother's taste for bibelots and Victorian extravaganzas, when he said, almost with irritation: "No, I don't want anything."

"Your mother and I were talking about what your plans were for the winter," he said. He was exposing his idea staunchly. "We'd both like it very much if you stayed here. I happened to see Carter the other day—the man at the Museum—and he told me that there's an opening in the library there, with a chance at helping set up the exhibits they get in. I don't propose and I don't think your mother does either, that you should live in the apartment. You'll want your own place. Perhaps you could share a small apartment with a friend."

Without knowing why, her anxiety grew. She noticed the way his moustache worked as he talked.

"It's a compliment to be asked to stay, thank you," she said gently, knowing he was waiting for her answer. "But after three years at the Louvre, it would seem a waste to end up working in a library. It wasn't really the kind of job I was looking for."

"You'd have to work your way up from the bottom. You couldn't expect to go in and take over Carter's job after two weeks."

"I didn't mean that. But perhaps I could find something that better fits what I was trained to do—not necessarily here but in another city. Arranging books on shelves wasn't what I had in mind."

He drew in his lips, spreading his hands on the tablecloth, and tapped with the tips of his fingers, the way Martha's grandmother had done when she grew old. "All right, I can see you have a point there. You've passed your exams and done very well, I know, because your mother's told me—and it would seem a waste to be tidying up books. There would be openings, if you stuck with it long enough. But never mind. I do think, if you cast your mind back over the last years you've spent in France, you'll see that from your point of view—not mentioning ours—that it would be a good idea to stay here for at least a year. There may be certain things that are acceptable in Paris, or down by the Mediterranean, but are still just not done in this city."

Her stomach felt as though it were dropping away, with the same sensation one experienced in fast elevators.

"What do you mean?" In her mind, she reached for her sword, raised it into position by her side, then remembered past battles. It was of no use. She had fought with Richard and what he called his Principles. She hadn't changed him and in the end, she had left.

"I mean just this: that it isn't a good idea to have it known that a girl's cooked breakfast regularly for her boyfriend. It's not a good habit to get into. In Paris or on the Riviera or anywhere. Not for a girl like you." He made the words as sharp as pieces of shattered glass but he had done his duty. For a second, as her face burnt, she wondered who it was he was criticizing; apparently he felt injured by a girl connected with him who made a serious mistake. His "Eh?" which he now added in order to provoke an answer from her, silenced her. The room had shrunk again and in her imagination, she saw a child with the same dark curly hair she had had as a little girl, wandering among the trunks of enormous trees whose leaves were carried so far above the ground that they were almost out of sight. The child kept trying to climb the smooth boles but she slipped back repeatedly, finally becoming desperate and calling to the adult, who Martha recognized as herself, to help her. Soft-stemmed vines curled across the ground and bright insects played on the petals of the white orchids.

"Times have changed, Bernard," Mrs. Summerwell broke in, looking at her daughter's face and moving a little impatiently in her chair. Martha glanced back; but her mother had finished. She had always waited to be led by her husbands and saw the necessity of surrender on all questions that were important. A man couldn't live without that support.

"They haven't changed that much," he said. "You weren't any happier, if you're going to be honest about it, with what was being said about Martha than I was. Admit it. And don't try to hide things that shouldn't be hidden."

He's an old man with age spots, Martha thought, looking at the brown dots and dashes on the backs of his hands. What he said made no difference to her, although it did matter that he was married to her mother and that therefore she was forced to listen to him. He hadn't forgotten the Depression when with a reduced income he had been trying to keep up his posiiton. He wanted terribly, with his sense of family loyalty, for everything to go right for her. He was showing his concern and love; she would have to accept the form in which he gave it.

"Be a good girl and run over to see Aunt Beatrice," Bernard said the next morning when Mrs. Summerwell had left the apartment early and Martha had cooked a breakfast of bacon and eggs for him. "You only have to stay a minute. She's up there all alone. She'd like to see you." Aunt Beatrice was a half-sister whom Bernard seldom saw because she made him restless. She lived on the top floor of a nearby apartment building with an enormous view out over the River.

Martha nodded. "I'll do that after I've finished the dusting. I thought I'd clean up the living room a bit."

"You don't have to char the whole place. We've got a woman to do that, it's not your job. Old Mrs. Whatshername. She needs a bath, I don't

know how your mother can stand her. But apparently her husband is sick and she's kept on out of charity."

Martha put the plates in the dishwasher, refolded the newspaper and swept the kitchen floor. She'd chosen a light green blouse which Bernard had once said he liked, put on a pair of shoes with heels and used lipstick. When she came out of her room, he was standing in the hall, rocking a little on his heels, his hands in his pockets.

"I said what I said last night because I thought it would do you good," he said, ignoring the blouse. "I was young once too. . . ." He laughed and waited for her to respond. "My parents didn't take any nonsense from me and it's thanks to them I came through some pretty tough times. The trouble with all your generation," he added, "is that it has too much money."

"That may be one of the troubles," she said evenly, "but surely it's not the whole story."

"What is the whole story then?" It came out amiably at first, then flat and heavy. She suddenly felt his fear as though it were her own. Perhaps it was because he was standing so close to her in the hall. They had seldom been alone together for longer than a few minutes.

"I'm sorry if either you or my mother was upset by something I did. I don't know who it was who was repeating stories," she said.

"We're not talking about how gossip got around—and I won't tell you who it was we heard it from. We're talking about a fact. It wasn't the purpose of what I said last night—to argue. I just wanted to say that neither your mother nor I want it to happen again." His fear had lessened, the words had been light and soft, mocking the disciplinary intent.

She almost shook her head in disbelief as she moved away to the broom closet. He went on: "Your mother gave you and your brother a lot of freedom, much more than my wife and I gave our daughters. Your brother has turned out all right but maybe in spite of his upbringing and not because of it."

He hated verbosity, any kind of long conversation. The important things were clear and easy to say.

No, I won't let him down, Martha thought, wondering at the same time how she could accomplish it, closing the closet door with a firm snap, then moving back into the hall. She refilled her coffee cup in the kitchen and followed Bernard to the living room, which was where he had indicated he wanted her.

"You'd do us a great kindness, Martha, if you stayed here this winter," he said after a brief pause when he had looked at her appraisingly.

So he thinks me even more unreliable than he'd realized. Martha thought She laughed and as she did, the cup slipped on her lap. She wished she didn't have to be as clumsy.

"As you know, both my children are living in other places," he said. "I'd really like it if you stayed. We seem to get along all right."

She smiled and leaned over to touch him on the arm, shaking her head at the same time. The child was screaming now in the jungle, so that the sounds must have been almost audible. The little girl kept pulling at

her hand. "Well Miss Martha," he added, "we'll see what we can do to make you stay. I for one don't believe in family quarrels and cutting off one's own flesh and blood. . . ." He rubbed his hand over the top of his head, as though confused.

She laughed gently.

"Oh I think you'd both get tired of me," she coaxed, trying to keep the child's voice well locked inside herself so that it couldnt be heard.

"No, that's an excuse. We wouldn't get tired of you."

"Even if I caused you trouble?" But she was only playing at threatening him. He took fright.

"We're not made of sugar candy. We have our own ways of getting things."

"Candy has a way of dissolving. Simply disappearing." She had said too much and was hardly in control any more.

He spread his hands out on the tops of his knees.

"Your mother and I are very fond of you."

She looked across at him, his face was lowered and he appeared sad. The child was crying, by itself among the trees, seeing eyes reflecting in the dim light and shapes forming on the earthy floor. A large insect had crawled near the little girl's feet, causing her to start, then turn to clutch Martha's hand. She tried to shove away the twining fingers, as though the child were real and standing beside her chair in the living room. All Martha succeeded in doing was to spill her half-empty cup of coffee on the floor.

After mopping up the puddle, she went to her room and lay down on her bed. She could hear Bernard walking in the hall, waiting near her door, then going on. Once he stopped and said through the crack: "I'm sorry. Perhaps I went at it tactlessly."

She tried to attach herself to the sun coming in through the window, remembering how the broken ice on the River looked at this time of year. Later, trees would begin to lose their somber look and she would walk without boots on dry sidewalks. No one except those who lived with snow all winter could understand the pleasure. The child in her imagination began to talk and Martha leaned down to kiss it. The little girl stood, embraced her, then trotted off to a clearing where she began to pick the flowers, talking all the time to herself. It left Martha free to think of Richard, of the city, of her mother and even of Bernard. The trouble was that she loved them.

Teeth

Are windows
To the house
Of laughter

• Dana Scott

Breakthrough

• T. Alan Broughton

The other night
(the night of the wind,
when we rose in the morning
and found the rocks and garden strewn
with green pine cones
too soon fallen
and one long limb of hemlock
dashed across the shed)
before the wind came
and while we both lay
pretending to sleep
as much because we wanted to be
as that we feared the sound
of our own voices,
there came a scatter
of light feet on the porch
and breath by the window
(you thought it only fur against the screen)
and as if such ripples
gave us leave to move,
oblivious to the way
it may have broken
over rock and garden,
we moaned our love aloud.
Later the wind came
pounding those green and heavy cones
across the roof.
And I remind you of this
now, hoping the moment
will always come in such a way
that silence makes us pause,
then breaks itself
and gives us leave to play.

And the Holy Ghost

• Pamela Painter Skeen

On my third trip past St. John's Cathedral I was pretty sure it was the place. So it was almost three, give or take a few minutes, when I finally went up the icy walk, opened the heavy carved door, and stepped inside. I managed not to look over my shoulder which always made the back of my neck tingle, so I'm not sure the effort was worth it. Shoplifters and zookeepers probably have the same feeling. Then I shut the door too fast and the echo was enough to wake old J. C. himself. A week ago my roommate complained that ever since he'd noticed me looking under the bed every night he hadn't been able to sleep with his feet outside of the covers. Whatever the hell that meant.

I listened but I couldn't hear anything. It was bright outside and the glare of the sun on the new snow made my eyes ache, and now it took awhile for them to get accustomed to the dark. Christ, are these places like tombs. I felt like Romeo looking for Juliet, although if I really thought about it I'd rather be meeting the nurse who's a hell of a lot more interesting. But Romeo couldn't have been expected to know that at his age. Not that I've had any affairs with older women, but I can appreciate character. And not that all older women have character; most of them are childbearing TV sets, but when you do meet one who has lived, it really shows.

Shapes were beginning to emerge now like so many soft-footed ushers at a funeral, but I still didn't have a sense of having been here before. I knew this was the place—bright red doors and all. I took a few steps into the dim vestibule, shifted my books, and tried to get my bearings. It was an ordinary entrance with the usual free literature on display, and heavy wooden coatracks lining the walls. There's something depressing about empty coathangers—if it weren't so damn cold I'd cover at least one of them. A couple of doorways stood on one side and a wide stairway led to a balcony. Christ, it's a good thing none of the guys can see me now. Being here drunk is one thing, being sober—that's something else. I seem to have a strange affinity for churches recently—which is more than I can explain. And here I am again. I must be going nuts. But I think I know when it began.

When I first came to college I was pretty lonely. I wrote to friends, but it wasn't the same, so I used to go to confession at the Catholic Church two blocks from the south end of campus. I know enough of the jargon to get by. I'd enter the confessional and talk about a few sins like swearing and sleeping around, and then when I thought I'd sinned enough to interest the priest I'd get into a discussion with him. I went at an odd time so no one after me had to wait and I made a point to get Father Graniff after the first few times cause he seemed most receptive to my ideas. One time when

I was trying to make a point about the lack of a social conscience in Americans I started making gestures to emphasize my points. The confessional was about the size of a telephone booth so of course I occasionally thumped the walls, which was accidental. I'm not violent at all, although sometimes I get the feeling that that is the only way for us to feel relevant. I don't know. Anyway, it must have sounded like I enjoyed it too much because the Father finally asked me if I were a Catholic. I admitted I wasn't, but assured him that I believed in confession. The priest replied that I hadn't exactly been confessing anything, although he'd enjoyed hearing my views on world affairs and was glad young people were concerned. Then he suggested that I join the church. I knew that was coming. I was very gentle in saying "no" but I don't think he understood. He was quite nice about it though, and told me to come back anytime. I never did. I was embarrassed and by then I'd gotten to know some of the guys.

And here I am now in another church. My gloves were beginning to feel clammy where the lining had been worn away, so I peeled them off and stuffed them into my pocket. I brushed my hair off my forehead for about the hundredth time and rubbed my eyes. Then I looked around for the stand with the visitors' book on it and a pencil tied to a hook with a grey frayed string. It was in the same place as before—which wasn't too amazing— a fake brown leather book with gold tassels which really belonged in a whore house, and had probably been bought by some old spinster who had finally found God instead of a husband. I tiptoed over to it and looked for my name. There it was, "Kevin Darnan," at the top of page thirty-one, practically illegible and taking up two full spaces like the scrawl of a second grader. I guess I was here. Up to now I hadn't been absolutely sure, but this was proof. I tore out the page, folded it three times, and stuffed it into my psych book. Then I realized that I wasn't being fair to the three people who had signed their names after mine—not that they would ever know, but they would think they were listed and I didn't want to disappoint them. Some people take things so seriously. So I unfolded the sheet and in my three best writing styles copied the names onto page thirty-three.

I wasn't getting any warmer just standing there so I began to wander around and then decided to take the balcony steps two at a time. It was even colder up there. Jesus, they must turn off the heat during the week then turn it up Saturday night for Sunday morning. As if saving money were a problem. Congress should tax churches so they would pay their way. Imagine not taxing profits from a girdle factory. Which reminds me of another sore subject, namely my goddam mother buying a memorial pew for Dad. That four hundred bucks could have helped some poor bastard get through college instead of holding up some hypocrite's ass. And nobody uses these places through the week so they're just a waste of space. You couldn't count my last visit because I was drunk—I could've puked on the altar for all I knew. The Catholics are the only ones that have a chance. Their confession is the greatest invention used by organized religion. You have to talk to someone. Priests can't go away or pass out on you like your roommate and you can't see them if they yawn.

The only light in the church was the sun coming through the stained glass windows and even it seemed to grow colder changing to red and yellow, blue and green. I put my hand into one of the red spots and was disappointed not to feel anything. Goddam, it was cold. I slid into the nearest pew, avoiding the speckled lights, and dropped my books beside me.

Except for a few things, last Saturday night is a blur. Which is why I guess I'm here now. I can't remember exactly what happened except that Grace had been making a stupid ass of herself over Dave—she was probably feeling sexy with that low neckline. It's easy to tell when a girl is feeling sexy—they kind of sprout or something. I can always tell. Anyway for some stupid reason I'm always getting embarrassed when somebody is making an ass out of himself—sometimes it's someone I don't even know. Then when I try to help they get insulted. There was Grace sprouting all over the place like she was some movie starlet picked to play tulip. Dave was really getting a kick out of her. She'd have felt like hell the next morning if I had let her drink any more. Christ, I can't imagine where I got this thing about helping people. It's almost disgusting. And anyone could see Grace couldn't have cared less. I tried to get her to leave but she wouldn't so I stayed around for a while longer and drank a lot more. Finally I announced my departure from a wobbly keg of beer. Thank God they hadn't taken me seriously. Not that I was serious. I was stoned and all so they just laughed. I even started to make that damn pledge then and there in the dorm until Joe Aldridge began singing "What a Friend we Have in Jesus" though where the hell Joe ever learned that is beyond me since he's about the most unethical bastard who ever lived. Anyway that really made me mad, so I left as fast as I could which wasn't very fast because I was drunk and had to go to the john besides.

I always have to go to the john at crucial times, but at least I don't have any repression about it like my mother does. She used to feed me teaspoons full of salt before bedtime when I was still having "a little problem." When this didn't work she decided I wasn't getting enough love from my father and tried to promote a "closer father-son relationship." She insisted we go fishing, which we both hated, and bought us dozens of model airplanes and ships to assemble, which she finally put a stop to when they began overflowing the house. And one night at dinner she brightly chirped that she thought it would be fun if we started taking showers together for God's sake. Which wasn't the problem cause I really liked my old man. At last some doctor straightened her out—some people just have to go more than others. And after drinking beer I'm like a sieve.

I was getting cold again and beginning to feel like the Hunchback of Notre Dame so I went back downstairs. I pushed through some swinging doors with little window crosses, walked up the aisle toward the front of the church and stood looking around for a few minutes. Then I went up the two shallow steps to the first landing and stepped behind the pulpit, which was where I'd stood Saturday night to give my speech. It was shaped like half a hexagon and sort of curbed around you like a shield. I put my hands on the polished sides, leaned forward, and got a belligerent look on my face. Psychologically these things are great. I never would have

failed speech class if old lady Gaines had had one of these in her room—all speakers use them. But she made you stand up in front of the room with your arms dangling and knees shaking and your friends giving you the finger. Some poor frightened bastards even got a hard on. It wasn't exactly conducive to eloquence. And then you had to fill in these evaluations and everyone used the same old generalizations like "more eye contact." It was usually the guy who had given you the finger who said that, although you could see his point too. You feel silly as hell giving someone the finger if he doesn't even look at you. Another thing—preachers get to wear long black robes like a disguise. Put a robe on me and I could say anything too. I'll never forget Dad's funeral service. The goddam preacher thought he would reach me in a weak moment so he gave this sermon on why he knows there is a God. I swear any other time I'd have walked out. Dad and I had had some pretty good discussions before he died. Nothing too philosophical but he had sort of shyly admitted that he didn't believe the after life bit either. If only Dad hadn't died. But I have to stop thinking about it. In fact I've finally learned that you really don't have to think about something if you don't want to. If you don't.

So instead I tried to remember what I'd said while standing up here Saturday night. I know I felt pretty good about it Sunday morning even with a hangover and all. It was the forest and trees thing I came up with a couple of years ago. Everything you learn up to age sixteen represents a tree, so that by the time you're ready for some serious thinking you've already produced a forest. Then you have to start all over again cutting down old trees and fill it up again. Like I know kids from high school who didn't mind the way *Moby Dick* was all tied up in a neat little package for them. So they planted that tree and be damned to anyone who tried to change their minds. Like Dad's business friends—their ideas were practically petrified. At least Dad had tried.

I brought the church back into focus. The empty pews seemed like beds in a hospital ward waiting for sick souls. Imagine anyone feeling as if a God cared in such a sterile place. That's probably why so many people take their troubles to bartenders. I straightened up and tucked my shirt in my jeans. So what the hell did I have to say now, here, to this cold gloomy church. I mean was anything really necessary besides coming back once more? I turned around and went up another step to the next landing. The front of the church was stark and strangely modern and, except for a large mahogany altar, resembled the reception rooms of a dozen downtown offices. Granted there was a sculpture of Christ on the cross hanging on the wall, but in another setting it could easily pass for "Wild Flowers" or "Love in the Afternoon." And speaking of settings, that altar would make a great bar for a bachelor pad. Wonder why no one ever thought of it. Old altars must be somewhere—maybe to altar heaven like the fish in Brooks' poem. I paced it off to estimate it and came up with about six and a half feet. Then I started flipping through the bible to find the Psalms. Old Singer really knew how to read them.

I was getting restless and without even thinking I sat down on the steps and lit up a cigarette, which I put out on the bottom of my shoe with-

out taking a drag. I could feel my face getting red. I couldn't see to the back of the church because it was too dim but it sure looked like people were sitting in the pews in clumps here and there because of the light coming through the windows. It wouldn't fool anyone. It just seemed that way. I nodded to my kaleidoscopic audience, made the sign of the cross, and said "Amen." I looked at my watch because I knew it was getting about time for my psych course, but I didn't feel like leaving yet. It was a dumb requirement anyway. If the course were any good maybe I could help someone, instead of memorizing experiments and dates and names.

I had vaguely noticed an unpleasant odor when I first came up front and now that I thought about it something definitely smelled. Somewhere near. I didn't have my tennis shoes on so I got up and sniffed around, although I might have known. Mother was always telling the story how much I cried when I was baptized, and no wonder. Christ, this font looked like a birdbath. The water must be the same stuff used to baptize George Washington. I decided the least I could do was empty it before I left, so I looked around for the john which was in the most obscure place possible without making it invisible. Architects never want to embarrass God by letting him know that people go to the john. This guy must have had a real complex. When I finally found the washroom I went back for the bowl which was heavy as hell, so I carried it like waiters carry trays in fancy restaurants. Hell, the janitor probably couldn't lift it, and I can't imagine them having a syphon in church. Halfway there I pretended I was taking some rich dame pheasant under glass and was feeling pretty cocky when I almost dropped the damn thing, which brought it to within an inch of my nose—something I could have done without. I poured out the crummy water and began to refill it, but the smell was still there so I looked around for something to clean it with. I used some old Comet that was sitting in a corner and had to keep going back for towels. This is what I mean by trying to help people. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if I come once a month from now on and change the water the whole damn time I'm in college. Christ what if someone came in and thought I was stealing the font—for an ice bucket no doubt. I can just hear old Dean Cramer telling mother I'd been caught stealing a baptismal font. The funny thing is she wouldn't even care. She'd just thank God I had finally made my way back to church. She'd probably even tell the dean what a good job he was doing in educating her son. It would almost be worth it to see his face.

I finally got the bowl clean and filled it with fresh water. It didn't smell like any rose garden, but at least it didn't stink. I wanted to put a sign in it saying "Cleanliness is next to Godliness" and looked around in some of the pews for a pencil. I couldn't find one, which was just as well because I didn't want to leave any traces behind. I ran my finger over the wood of one of the hymnal holders. When I was a kid I used to play a game of sorts with the holder on the back of the seat in front of me to keep from being bored. I made a scratch on the holder everytime we sat in that particular pew. We sat in the same one so often that I ran out of room. Not that I really did, it's just that the scratches were pretty evenly spaced and I didn't want to stick one just anywhere. Even then I was very

methodical. And besides all those scratches began to depress me. They represented a lot of goddam Sundays.

I dug around in my pockets for a dime to put in the corner of the holder where only a kid would look. I hoped he wouldn't find it until after they took up collection. I'd found a dime once and put it in my mouth to hide it, but it dropped out in the middle of the Lord's Prayer and my mother made me put it in the collection plate.

The light was almost gone. I hadn't even missed the colored spots and the stained glass windows had all turned black. I hadn't meant to stay so long. Why the hell I felt compelled to come I'd never know. Except that Saturday night I made that stupid promise to be a preacher for God's sake —I just wanted to clear that up. I looked at my watch and couldn't believe the time. I'd never make psych class now, but I still had some things to do before dinner. I pulled on my gloves, zippered up my coat, and looked around for my books. Churches sure are spooky at night. When I was little, Jesus and God never seemed too real to me but I never had any trouble believing in the Holy Ghost. I opened the door, glanced around behind me, and stepped out into the cold night.

Lesson for Tomorrow

• **Arthur M. Miller**

Area is more real than volume:
nothing stops at the edges.
Something goes beyond

Behind the edge of an outline
there is a shadow
not the object
nor a space of dark
but another object behind the edge

I have seen them solid as circles
yet dubious as trapezoids:
empty geometry eating space behind my table and behind
the flagpole and behind
my distant friends
and evermore behind
your face.

Ocean City That Time

• Alfred Ruggiero

Have I returned at last to find
That even my memories are
Dreams—Hopes turning back
For a last look at
Almost summers
Of lighthouses and early mists
And endless miles of beach:
The Bay on one side, the
Green Atlantic on the other—
Narrow islands up and down the coast
Where we lose ourselves, now,
In bodies and yellow hair,
Thick-clustering . . . golden . . . hair.
Crazy us, crazy the sun at noon.
In intensest noon heat, when the summer
Air writhes, contorts, then faintly shimmers
With a sickly faint,
We have visions never dreamed of before:
Young, slender bodies and golden hair—
Like swayed to music—
Dance, slowmotion, on the beach;
Writhe, contort, then faintly shimmer.
From the boardwalk (up and down the coast),
Or away on the dunes, or from a beach towel,
I cannot hear their music, can only see
Through summer haze,
Laughs, loves, pain—
You were here, Walt Whitman, on this Jersey shore;
You lay on these islands
Under the noon
And touched the bodies, sweats, heat;
Did they dance for you, Walt Whitman?
Did you hear their music?
And I know you walked here in the moon
And felt them in the closeness of the mist—
And even more closely when the mist was gone
And the ocean sound—the sea vision—infused you in the endless night.

I read somewhere, Walt Whitman, that you
Came here in the cold and bleak of November.
The sea was gray then.
And why did it crash so upon the beach?

Does he seek to wash away all memory of us, Walt?
Or does he hope, by capturing that
Last empty beer can, orphan of
September (that the wind drives so wildly toward its own November kingdom),
He'll remember summer children in
The long sad dreams to come,
And feel them close and warm them
Under almost summer sun?

So Long Mom

• **Bruce Berger**

She raised you from a little cell
She dropped into the slime
And suckled beneath the sea,
Complicating you bit by bit,
An experiment at a time.
So slow it was you grew
You could hardly tell,
Yet changed so radically
No doubt you'd laugh
If someone told you that was you
In an early photograph.
Improvised to an age when
Your mother found you fit,
She took you by the fin
Up the sloping sand
To where the water burst apart,
And showed you the promised land.
Unraveling fresh extremeties, she
Drew you into the heart
Of alien deserts and plains, in
And out of trees, and if
At times she played a little rough,
She only wanted you to stand
On your own two feet.
With a quixotic whim
She tacked on a nimble thumb
And a cave for the brain to expand.
With distance now, a certain poise
And satisfied to the bone,
You announce yourself complete.
So kiss Mama goodbye, boys,
You're on your own.

Contributors

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